

November 3, 2005
Public Forum Minutes
Cape Girardeau, MO

Present:

Russell McCampbell (from Columbia) - Chairman and representing business and industry

Lawrence Luck (from Columbia), Co-Chairman and parent of a blind child

Debbi Head (from Wentzville) - Inclusion Facilitator at the Eatonville E.C.S.E. Program which works with blind and visually impaired students

Brian Wekamp (from Jefferson City) - representing the National Federation of the Blind

John Wunder (Cleveland) - parent of a blind individual)

Beverly Kaskadden (from Lake St. Louis) - Consumer

William Burris (from West Plains)- representing the southern Missouri and member of Missouri Council for the Blind

Ceil Callahan (from Jefferson City) - (client protection and advocacy representative from Client Protection Program

James Sucharski (from St. Louis) - Superintendent, Missouri School for the Blind

Clay Berry (from Kansas City) - representing Alpha Pointe, a community rehabilitation facility

Mark Laird – Supervisor of Field Operations, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind

Mike Merrick - Policy Development Coordinator, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind

William Cobb (from Sikeston) - Area supervisor for the quadrant which represents 24 counties in Southeastern Missouri

Martha Kiesling - worker from Sikeston Ofc

Daniel Nellis (from St. Louis) - Executive Director for Missouri Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

A local agency, the Community Caring Council, had recently developed a new service and wanted to know what factors were

significant in the process of the rehabilitation of the blind. The following areas were discussed:

- The need to include clients in a network of support and information.**
- Factoring in other health considerations during rehabilitation**
- The purpose of community rehab centers which is to provide intensive training to enable people to learn to become comfortable with their disability as well as be functional.**
- newly blinded individuals are generally targeted for developing mobility, independent living and job skills as opposed to those who have received services throughout their development.**
- The School for the Blind has an outreach program that works with local communities and individuals who have a later onset of blindness and schools will sometimes hold up the diploma so that the School for the Blind can provide the training and adaptive skills before turning 21**
- The disabled generally prefer not to leave their local area for training to avoid the risk of losing housing and becoming disconnected from friends, family and other community supports.**

Several resources were proposed by Council members. First, it was suggested that this agency refer clients to the Rehabilitation Service for the Blind's Sikeston office to utilize its vocational resources, supportive services such as assisting in developing mobility and other independent living skills, and, if needed, counseling and supportive services to the family. Rehabilitation Service for the Blind is a choice based program for the client if those services are needed to assist the client in meeting vocational objectives.

It was also noted that there are local training resources through Southeast Missouri State University. Other resources such as Paratransit, Southeast Transit and the Center for Independent Living may be able to provide information and assist in other capacities. And, it was noted that the Wolfner Library can connect clients with a service for reading almost 200 newspapers, including the Southeast Missourian.

Discussion followed Rehabilitation Services for the Blind's efforts to recruit new employees to the agency and about the Masters level Blindness Specialist Program training program at Southwest Missouri College.

**State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind
November 4, 2005
BUSINESS MEETING**

Council Members Present - Russell McCampbell (Chair), Lawrence Luck (Co-Chair), Clay Berry, William Burris, Ceil Callahan, Debbi Head, Beverly Kaskadden, James Sucharski, Brian Wekamp, John Wunder

Council Members Absent – Donna Borgmeyer, Stanley Grimsley, James Pelfrey, Abby Pfefferkorn, Ruby Polk, Mary Kay Savage, April Toolooze, Michael Fester

Also present – Michael Merrick (RSB) Mark Laird (RSB), Daniel Nellis (Executive Director to the Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind)

SIKESTON OFFICE:

William Cobb delivered a presentation about the Sikeston Office. It is fully staffed with two (2) rehab counselors, one (1) mobility instructor, two (2) rehabilitation instructors and three (3) support

staff. It also has a child specialist they share with the St. Louis - South office. The Sikeston district covers twenty-four (24) counties in Southeast Missouri. This past year, they have provided services in three hundred and seventy three (373) cases - ninety-three (93) in Independent Living, approximately one hundred fifty (150) clients in the Older Blind Services program and one hundred thirty (130) vocational rehabilitation cases.

Some of the occupations in which some of their clients have achieved employment include: medical technician, furniture restorer, clerical worker, and business entrepreneur. Some clients are being trained as an attorney, an architect and as an Internal Revenue Service specialist.

AMENDMENT TO BY- LAWS:

The proposed amendment to the Council's By- Laws was presented.

A motion to change this article to read:

Officers may serve without term limitations

was made by William Burris and was seconded by Clay Berry.

Council member John Wunder expressed the rationale for amending the By- Laws at the August 12, 2005 meeting. He stated that it would be a disservice to the Council to deprive it of efficient and effective leadership as long as the individuals were willing to serve and the Council wished to elect them.

A secret ballot was held and the vote to change the By- Laws was unanimous.

SATISFACTION SURVEY:

The results and format of the client satisfaction survey were presented and discussed. It was agreed that some of the questions needed to be clarified. Council members Ceil

Callahan, Lawrence Luck, and Brian Wekamp and Mike Merrick (Policy Development Coordinator - Rehabilitation Services for the Blind), will focus on further refining the survey instrument. The Council also suggested the formation of an organized dialogue between consumers and agency for the purpose of developing more in-depth information and recommended that the report be shared with Rehabilitation Services for the Blind staff.

Council members anticipated that ongoing trend data could be generated from more frequent surveys. The motion to conduct a quarterly Client Satisfaction Survey was made by Debbi Head, seconded by Clay Berry and carried unanimously.

Lawrence Luck moved and William Burris seconded the motion to accept the Client Satisfaction Report. The motion carried unanimously.

ANNUAL REPORT:

The initial draft of the Council's 2005 Annual Report's contents and format were discussed. It was agreed to vary from the 2004 Annual Report format in order to make the document more readable to the public by reducing statistical data. The report should be finalized and submitted for conference call to Council members around the first week of December to identify and accommodate changes.

STATE OF MISSOURI REVIEW:

Mark Laird reported on the State audit which covered the period from 2001 to 2004. Most of the identified issues occurred during the 2001 to 2003 time period and have been or are being addressed.

This audit reviewed the impact on provision of maintenance dollars and the changes that were implemented. During the preceding year, those changes did not result in a decrease of services to clients. The resulting savings were used to provide services to clients in other areas. There was a \$9000 surplus which is the dollar cost for one successful rehab closure. He

said that without these changes, there would have been a significant spending deficit.

Improvements in data processing and retrieval allow Rehabilitation Services for the Blind supervisors to monitor and maintain better control on service dollars as well as make appropriate and timely decisions.

Council member James Sucharski offered a motion, which was seconded by William Burris, that the Council express its support for efficient State government as well as its concern for maintaining program and funding integrity of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind.

The motion was unanimously approved. Russell McCampbell (Council Chair) will draft a letter that he will send to other Council members for their review and comments.

REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION REVIEW REVIEW:

Mark Laird briefed the Council about the Federal review audit. In general the report which included fiscal, case services and policies was positive. Rehabilitation Services for the Blind staff is awaiting the final report for specifics.

LOCATION CONSOLIDATION:

Mr. Laird informed the Council that all State of Missouri agencies are being directed to move in to State owned properties as a cost savings measure. The North & South Rehabilitation Services for the Blind offices are to move into 9900 Page Avenue. The move dates will be March for the North Office and June for the South Office. Both the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services and Workforce Investment will share a wing.

Transportation and accessibility issues are being studied so that appropriate accommodations can be made.

BLINDNESS EDUCATION SCREENING AND TREATMENT STEERING COMMITTEE:

The Council's representatives to the Steering Committee, Lawrence Luck and Clay Berry reported that many agencies were represented including mental health, public health, an optometrist, and an ophthalmologist. There was discussion but there were no definitive results. A report is being prepared by B.E.S.T. staff which will identify what will be done with the 'check off' funds. The Steering Committee's priorities were education, screening & treatment. The five (5) issues under consideration were:

1. public education & awareness,
2. access to services
3. identification of visually impaired people
4. the assessment of visually impaired people
5. establishing a continuum of care.

Rehabilitation Services for the Blind is the agency that has the experience with and the resources for serving this population. Rehabilitation Services for the Blind staff will inform the Council when the report has been issued. If there are further meetings, it was suggested the Lawrence Luck and Clay Berry continue to serve as the Council's representatives.

MISSOURI GOVERNMENT REVIEW COMMISSION:

Mr. Laird notified the Council that the Commission has recommended moving RSB to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This move would not have any impact on the activities and integrity of the agency. The National Federation for the Blind has communicated with the Governor's Office and recommended that the agency be given division status. The Council's expressed concern was that Rehabilitation Services for the Blind maintain its separate funding and program integrity.

MEDICAID LAWSUIT:

Michael Merrick (RSB) advised the Council on the status of the lawsuit filed by some Medicaid recipients; this suit's goal is to have all categories of disability treated equally. Among the State's cuts in Medicaid spending there were exemptions which enabled the blind to receive services. Restoration of these cuts was unlikely because of the overwhelming costs. The Chair, Mr. McCampbell, requested that Mr. Merrick provide the name for this case so that the Council could obtain a copy of the brief.

Services for Students Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired In Missouri - A Study Commissioned by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education:

James Sucharski reported on this commissioned study concerning students of Missouri School for the Blind. The recommendations were as follows:

- 1. Twelve out of fifteen (12 / 15) Focus Groups achieved consensus on the recommendation that a structured process be undertaken to develop and inculcate a Shared Vision regarding the education of students who are blind or VI among MSB staff, RSB staff, parents, school administrators, teachers, university faculty and staff, advocacy organizations, private providers, etc. Roles, rules, fiscal and human resources, and responsibilities traditionally assumed by these entities should be examined with the commitment to organize these resources in a fashion supportive of a Shared Vision for quality education.**
- 2. Educators and others interested in the education of students who are blind or VI must commit themselves to high expectations for all students who are blind or VI. Students' academic and adult outcomes are dependent on the adoption of high expectations for all. All students must be afforded:**
 - o High quality instruction in academics and the expanded core curriculum provided by highly qualified staff**
 - o Access to assistive technology that will allow blind and visually impaired students to interact with their environment in a manner reflective of their capabilities**

- Access to appropriate instructional materials in a manner consistent with the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standards (NIAMS) as outlined in IDEA, 2004.
 - Access to high quality transition planning, vocational education, and employment experiences as a part of the high school experience.
1. Nine out of fifteen (9 / 15) Focus Groups concurred that a review of personnel preparation is needed in Missouri to appropriately respond to the personnel needs of local school districts.
- Certification standards should be reviewed to ensure that prospective teachers are appropriately trained with respect to Braille, Nemeth Code, Assistive Technology and other competencies necessary to ensure students' needs relative to the expanded core curriculum are met.
 - Local school districts, using professional development funds, and universities, using appropriations and available external funding sources, should allocate the financial resources necessary to support Teacher Education and Orientation and Mobility education for aspiring educators. The low incidence of the blind / VI population may require state level consideration for additional financial support for these programs.
 - Personnel preparation should ensure an appropriate level of practicum and mentoring support of prospective and new personnel in the field. University of Missouri at St. Louis, Missouri School for the Blind and school staff can work together to accomplish this and thereby better ensure lower attrition of staff from the field.

- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) should review certification standards to ensure that fully certified professionals from other states that meet standards comparable to those in Missouri are given the opportunity for full certification in Missouri.
1. The role of the Missouri School for the Blind should be reviewed and consideration given to the following:
 - Continued availability of a strong residential and educational programs
 - Curriculum review and revision to ensure that curriculum at MSB is aligned with the Grade Level Expectations and grade level assessments developed by DESE
 - Assurance that Missouri School for the Blind is able to provide training, technical support and assistance in accessing assistive technology required by students who are blind or visually impaired
 - Development of flexible service delivery models capable of providing intensive instruction in critical skill areas for students for short periods of time (summer programs or other short-term service models).
 - Redefinition and expansion of Outreach Services that have a regional capacity and draw on resources from MSB, Blindness Skills Specialists, fully certified local school district staff, and Children's Specialists from RSB to meet the needs of rural Missouri and other schools districts with technical assistance and support needs.
 - Assume a position of leadership among school districts, private providers, other state agency

personnel and university faculty to coordinate and facilitate a comprehensive program of personnel development for professionals and paraprofessionals working with blind and visually impaired students throughout the state.

- Coordinate the establishment of a statewide social support network for students who are blind or visually impaired. Such a network should provide multiple opportunities for students to join together physically in a common location or via electronic means to develop meaningful social networks with students who are similarly situated.**

- Coordinate the development of regional and statewide parent training and support networks for parents of students who are blind or visually impaired. Parents in focus groups consistently expressed the desire for meaningful interaction with experts and other parents as they respond to the ongoing challenges of parenting**

Debbi Head moved that the Council support these recommendations, Clay Berry seconded her motion, which carried unanimously.

TOPICS FOR FEBRUARY'S BUSINESS MEETING:

- 1. Standards and Indicators**
- 2. Policies and procedures regarding transition services**
- 3. August meeting location**

The meeting was adjourned